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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (8/06): National dialogue must be based on "attachment to Palestine"

Main Stories:

The dominant story in all the dailies is the threat made by Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak to launch a widespread Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip. The threat, which Barak delivered in a speech before the Labor party on August 5 in Jerusalem, was broadcast on Israeli radio. All the dailies cover Hamas' subsequent warning to Israeli to refrain from committing any violations of the Hamas/Israel truce agreement. Al-Quds reports that in a press conference held on August 5, following a meeting of the former Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, Hamas leader Taher Al-Nunu confirmed Hamas' commitment to the truce and strongly warned Israel against violating it. Al-Ayyam quotes an unnamed Hamas leader as saying on August 5 that, "Barak's threats are 'ridiculous' and we [Hamas] are ready for all options." Al-Hayat Al-Jadida writes that Islamic Jihad and Hamas dismissed Barak's declarations as election propaganda.

Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front-page news about the expected meeting between Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on August 6 in Jerusalem. According to an AFP story cited by both dailies, the Chief Palestinian negotiator, Dr. Sa'eb Erekat, announced on August 5 that Abbas and Olmert will discuss final status issues that were raised "a year ago" under U.S. sponsorship. In addition, he said that they would discuss the issue of checkpoints in the West Bank and the fate of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons. The dailies also cite a story published in the Saudi newspaper Al-Watan, claiming that during today's meeting, Abbas expects Olmert to provide an answer to his request that Fatah leader Marwan Al-Barghouthi be released from prison. Abbas reportedly made this request when he met with Olmert in Paris.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida covers the August 5th meeting between President Abbas and U.S. Consul General Jacob Walles in Ramallah, citing the official Palestine news agency WAFA when writing that Abbas briefed the Consul General on the latest developments in the Palestinian Territories and on the efforts that have been made to push the peace process forward. This article is accompanied by a large, above-the-fold photo of Abbas and Walles during their meeting at the Presidential Office. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that a "reliable Palestinian source" said to AFP on August 5 that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will visit the Palestinian Territories and Israel on August 20 to meet with Abbas and Olmert, and with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. The source added that a trilateral Israeli/Palestinian/American meeting will be held to evaluate the negotiations and push them forward.

All dailies report that Washington revoked the visas of four students from the Gaza Strip who had received scholarships to study in the U.S. Agencies report that according to an American official, the visas of three Gazan students with Fulbright scholarships were revoked after receiving "new information on them [the students]." An official at the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem said, "we found new information which led us to revoke the visas prudentially." Officials added that the visa of a fourth student from the Gaza Strip, who had been granted a different scholarship, was also cancelled.

Al-Quds reports that Abbas met with members of the Hilles family from the Gaza Strip on August 5 at his office in Ramallah and reportedly reiterated his support for them.

All dailies highlight meetings that Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad held with various committees and institutions for the defense of Palestinian land on August 5. Fayyad thanked the committees and institutions for their hard work in dealing with the problems of the separation barrier and of settlement activities. He also praised the Palestinian people's tolerance of Israeli actions in Palestinian villages and of the suffering they endure due to the separation barrier and the settlements.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1. Independent Al-Quds runs its daily editorial entitled, "Dialogue based on attachment to Palestine" (8/06): "Although [Palestinian] parties [Fatah and Hamas] have closed their ears to the calls made by both Palestinians and the wider Arab world for a serious and effective dialogue for the sake of the lost Palestinian unity, it is the duty of all those who are loyal to the Palestinian people, its cause, and a Palestinian future on its own land, not to stop repeating their calls because these calls might in the end reach these two big parties [Fatah and Hamas] in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The two parties might realize that there is no other way except for dialogue and that dialogue is the only way to end the division and the split between the two sides [the Gaza Strip and the West Bank] of the homeland ... Only national dialogue based on an attachment to Palestine...can draw a limit to the division and split that we [Palestinians] have reached. The Palestinian leaderships and the decision makers of all factions...are responsible for the destiny of the [Palestinian] people and the Palestinian cause. These leaderships must be well qualified to launch Palestinian initiatives for reconciliation and end the division without the need of external mediation ... The worsening situation in the Gaza Strip reached the point where Fatah members took refuge in Israel after the sad clashes in the Al-Shaja'iya neighborhood in Gaza. Such deterioration in the situation is dangerous and is a warning for everybody as to the severe condition which the Palestinian cause has reached. The value of the Palestinian cause has become ridiculous in the eyes of Arab and international countries, when once the Palestinian struggle was an example of which all the world boasted. The majority of Palestinians ask for an end to this catastrophic situation, and again we say, and we will not tire of saying: enough."

